

## Head Greenkeeper's Report 5th July 2018



The golf course came out of the wettest winter on record really well. April and May were tough months as we experienced some very strong spring growth. It was all go for the greens team just to keep the course cut and clean. I thought the team did very well in presenting a well-manicured course with only three members of staff through this difficult period.



We have now gone to the other extreme with day temperatures in the 30's, no rain in over a month and none forecast either. The course has started to brown off but all the aeration work carried out on the fairways has helped to prolong the grass coverage on the fairways, continuing this work will improve them year after year. The next step in our fairway maintenance work if budgets allow, would be to introduce a wetting agent, PGR and Fertiliser programme.

I again arranged a machinery swap with Royal St. David's Golf Club which allowed us to have a Toro Procore 648 on site again saving hire fees of £250 per day. We used this every 2 weeks through the spring with 10mm tines at 50mm spacings at a depth of 100mm and we followed this each time with a 10 ton top dressing of straight sand. The Procore is very quick allowing us to get all greens completed in the day whilst keeping ahead of a very busy diary. The machine is also very light as it doesn't require a tractor to operate it. We are supplementing this aeration work with weekly Sorrel rolling. We purchased this machine second hand after I had found it on eBay for £200. They sell new for £3,500 so this was an absolute bargain of a purchase for us that allow us to keep the surfaces open quickly with almost zero disturbance.

An application of a granular 3-0-3 +3% Fe+Mg was made in late March to the greens to give them some colour after a very wet winter and harden them against any potential disease. This was followed by spoon feeding with liquids, Iron, PGR's and Biostimulants. I have continued with our soil biology programme this season with monthly applications of compost tea that we brew in the maintenance shed tank mixed with seaweed, humic acid, fulvic acid and liquid aeration. On a recent visit with our Symbio representative we took profile samples from the Practice green. The profile looked much improved from previous years with the organic matter in the upper profile breaking down and much improved rooting.

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The improved soil profile and increase in soil biology are now encouraging the bent grass to thrive. This can especially be seen now during the current drought as the *Poa annua* starts to struggle in the heat whilst the bent grass looks happy and is starting to spread. Whilst we still have a long way to go these are very positive signs and future over seedings will provide further gains to our bent grass. Once we achieve a 50% Bent 50% *Poa* sward we can then start to exert some pressure on the *Poa* by holding back irrigation and nutrient but at the moment we have to keep the *Poa* alive to keep smooth true surfaces. The improved soil biology has also prevented as many outbreaks of *Fusarium*. We have only sprayed the greens once so far this year, the outbreak occurred during the humid period at the end of May when we were experiencing heavy thunder storms making disease pressure very high. Again all positive signs with the way Fungicides are being revoked.



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The current drought has slowed grass growth right down with many areas dormant. Unfortunately we only have irrigation to all greens and some tees. The system is currently running to capacity with all greens and tees that are plumbed in, being irrigated through the night. The greens are then spot watered every morning ahead of the day's fixtures. I have been asked on many occasions by members about why we are not using the sprinklers. As mentioned above the automatic system runs at night starting at 10pm, we then hand water to keep moisture levels right on areas like slopes, high wear areas/(around holes) and hydrophobic spots. The white foam left is a wetting agent which helps get the water into the soil quicker and hold it there, this supplements our monthly applications of Revolution applied through the sprayer.

We irrigate the greens to keep them alive not for colour or softness or so golfers can stop the ball on the greens. The greens team has been working hard to correct the organic matter issues in the greens over recent years which in turn helps to promote the fine grasses, all this work would be wasted by over watering and over feeding now. Our irrigation system is over 30 years old now and this period of weather has shown where it is failing. There are areas of the system such as the 5th & 8th greens and 3rd, 8th, 10th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th tees that need improvements made. Trees are also causing issues as they out compete the turf for water and any adjacent to the teeing areas need removing.

Maintenance week will be commencing on August 13<sup>th</sup>. My plans for the week will be to vert-drain the greens with 12mm tines to a depth of 200mm+. The greens will then be hollow cored with 13mm tines at 50mm spacing. 40 tons of sand will then be spread onto the greens and worked into all the holes with our sweep n fill brush. I will then follow this with 2 passes of the Vreedo overseeder applying 40kg of Aber Majesty Browntop bent mix. Last year the greens took a little longer than I would have liked to recover after our maintenance work, so this year I will be applying a 5-3-8 Mycogro granular fertiliser. This will be taken up by the plant and with a PGR application so recovery should be much quicker

The new machinery is still performing very well with only a few teething issues which were sorted extremely quickly by Major Owen. I have been extremely pleased with the Toro's quality of cut, reliability and speed so far. We have recently been demonstrating greens irons; the results have been great with better surface smoothness and increased speeds with up to 18 inches achieved, without stressing the plant more than necessary. It has also proved beneficial in allowing us to miss cuts during periods of stress for a day or two whilst maintaining green speeds. A double cut at 3.5mm and double roll saw us achieving speeds of 11ft, 9 inches. We have so far tried the Toro GreensPro 1260 and the Tru-Turf 50inch machines. I will be looking at the Salsco, Baroness and Smithco machines as soon as they are available.

**Stuart Mason**  
**Head Greenkeeper**